

Jimmy Stewart Liked Working With Capra

By RENEE C. NELSON
Herald Today Editor

Jimmy Stewart is a warm, congenial human being, caught up in the goodness of the human race.

This is the impression one has of the veteran actor of 83 films which span a career of 53 years. In a Friday interview, he discussed at some length why he got into flying when he was drafted in 1941 — just nine months before Pearl Harbor.

Stewart Recalls the Past

By RENEE C. NELSON
Herald Today Editor

He is a man who supports lost causes like honesty, integrity, family and service to country, Brigham Young University curator James D'are said of Jimmy Stewart.

Students and fans crowded the de Jong Concert Hall Friday night for the personal appearance of the veteran actor, who has donated films, documents and papers to BYU.

"I have become interested, impressed and almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of what you do here and how you operate," Stewart told the appreciative audience.

Describing some of the movie greats, he singled out director Frank Capra as having the greatest influence on his career.

"Prior to making films with him," he said, "I had small parts in big pictures and big parts in small pictures. He stands for everything good — family, community, friends, country and a belief in God."

It was Capra who thrust Stewart into the limelight in 1938 with "You Can't Take It With You," and directed Stewart's 1939 film, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,"

"It wasn't exactly my choice," he said, recalling that it was the only lottery he ever won. But he didn't like the idea of using his influence to keep out of the service.

He emphasized that the war experience was amazing. "I had a commercial pilot's license," he said, noting that he had 300 to 400 hours of air time.

Stewart had always been interested in flying. Early on, he talked his dad into letting him go

up. "It cost \$10 for five minutes; I'd worked at my dad's hardware store and had the 10 bucks." He thought it was a nice touch on the way out. "When dad stopped and picked up the family doctor, I don't know what the doctor would have done in an airplane crash."

While stationed as a buck private at Moffitt Field in California, he did extension courses in order to get a commission. "As soon as I got my wings I instructed for two years," he said. He returned from the war as a colonel and war hero with 25 missions over enemy territory.

"I wasn't sure I hadn't lost the thing you need to have in acting," he said.

Stewart's deliberate speech patterns haven't changed much over the years. He weighs each word carefully, but he is articulate in his delivery.

It is understandable why he is revered in the entertainment industry. He retains a good sense of humor and a love of his fellow-man. Even in a question/answer period he has the ability to counter any questions which might cast a bad light on his fellow colleagues.

"Having worked with Hitchcock, how do you feel about some of the recent scandal that has been published?" asked a film student Friday in a question/answer session at the BYU Motion Picture Studio.

Instead of addressing the scandal issue, Stewart cleverly bypassed this and discussed Hitchcock — the director. "The way he used film was close to genius," he said, pointing out that Hitchcock wasn't worried about words. He was a script writer's nightmare. If the words created the right mood, this was the main concern.

"He was open to improvisation," Stewart added. "I remember one time in 'Rear Window'

after I had just broken my leg. Hitch said, 'Jim, what would you think about breaking the other leg?' I said, 'Fine.' I always knew he was right."

Another questioner asked about Doris Day in "The Man Who Knew Too Much."

"Did she have problems trusting Hitchcock as I have read?"

Stewart noted that Hitchcock seemed concerned that the song, "Que Sera," might have too much emphasis in the movie. But "No, there was no problem between them. She was perfect for the part."

And again, he called attention to his chase scene — chasing Doris Day — in the movie.

"You are talking so much, I'm having a hard time hearing the London Symphony," Hitchcock told Stewart.

"He was right again," Stewart recalled. "He was a visual genius, and it wasn't good for the camera to be coming in for close-ups of me talking."

Following two cuts from "The Philadelphia Story," Stewart pointed out that neither scene had been rehearsed.

"We just did them the way we thought they should be done." With a glint in his eye, he added that he wouldn't have minded rehearsing the love scene with Katharine Hepburn. "She has such tremendous vitality."

Of Kim Novak, who was a replacement for Vera Miles in "Vertigo," he said, "I had never worked with Kim before. She was excellent." He recalled one time when she asked Hitchcock, "What is my motivation in this scene?" and Hitchcock replied, "It is only

a movie." From then on Kim and Hitchcock got along fine.

Speaking of Frank Capra, he emphasized again that he owed him so much. Unlike Hitchcock, "Capra looked at the spoken word more delicately and visually."

Still up in the air after the war, Stewart recalled how he and Henry Fonda played tennis and flew kites. "One day Frank (Capra) called and said, 'I have an idea."

"And it was just an idea," Stewart said. Capra had two thoughts — 'No man is born to be a failure,' and 'No man is poor who has friends.' And from these two concepts came the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," the 1947 film which was shown Friday night at the de Jong Concert Hall. (see box)



Veteran Actor Jimmy Stewart talks to Herald Today Editor Friday during Provo visit.

Steve Heiner Photo